

Week 4 Reading Reflection

An interesting week's readings from Module 3. The key word that came across from all of them, although only mentioned in two, was 'qualitative.' This pertained to the need for G & T students to be given qualitative work rather than simply more of the same and I think we would all concur with that sentiment on the course. However, the reality in practice may not always be the same!

Berger's reading was very informative as it clarified for me what the modification of environment, content, process and product expectation and student response was, and entailed. However, what I thought what was most pertinent in the article was how a curriculum should respond to G & T students:

- by accelerating the mastery of basic skills
- by engaging students in active problem finding and problem solving activities and research; and
- by providing students with opportunities for making connections within and across systems of knowledge by focusing on skills, themes and ideas.
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I feel the only problem with this latter approach in the system we operate in is the rigidity of each subject area and how it is difficult to plan a unit of work across many subject areas that will make connections.

In some respects Riley's reading touches upon the same ideas as Berger. For instance, to plan for differentiation, Roberts and Roberts (2001) state that teachers must:

- identify the core content
- Pre-asses for students knowledge of the content; and
- Identify and plan core and complex content , basic and higher level processes, and a variety of products.

The principles of differentiation are also very compelling and extensive and these include: choice, acceleration, higher order thinking skills, research skills, independence, depth and breadth and so on. As alluded to above, these are all qualitative factors and not quantitative which is something we all need to bear in mind when differentiating for G & T students.

Finally, it was good to have Maker and Nielson (1995) clarify further the differences between content, process and product and to provide examples of each of these. To be honest, I was never really sure before!

Tomlinson outlines for us how differentiation works in the classroom and again, it was enlightening. As above, differentiation is a qualitative process, not a quantitative one. She also outlines what a differentiated class should look like:

1. Instruction is concept focused and principle driven which invites teachers to provide varied learning options
2. On-going assessment of student readiness and growth are built into the curriculum
3. Flexible grouping is consistently used
4. Students are active explorers and teachers guide this.

Tomlinson also outlines many strategies for managing a differentiated classroom including interest centres, learning contracts, graduated tasks and product-rubrics and so on.

Finally – acceleration! A very interesting and thought provoking article by Mackenzie-Sykes which was well supplemented with the discussion in class. I think, like many teachers, that acceleration as we know it (jumping a year level) is usually a bad thing. However, this article and Amanda's passionate defence of grade-skipping has convinced me that there is a time and a place for it provided it is done properly. All the research found by Mackenzie-Sykes supported the acceleration-is-a-good-thing argument and now I would agree with what the author and Amanda were arguing for. I also hadn't realised how many different forms of acceleration there were! It was also interesting to see how important the role of the teacher is/was in terms of identifying a student for acceleration, and the receiving of that gifted student.